



Series 2

Episode 29

Frenemies

Her name was Leona. When Hautboy walked through the door and saw her from across the room at the Starbucks on the main street off the Pup campus, he made it into three words. “Lee! Own! Ah!” His voice carried with the full dramatic thrust he intended, whooshing through all the other sounds in the room and taking over the place. *“Mes etoiles!”*

Leona, who was ordering an iced skinny grande triple decaf nonfat half mocha half chai Americano with an extra shot of pumpkin, turned at the sound of her name. For that matter, everyone in the room turned at the sound of her name. Seeing Hautboy LeMonde beaming in the doorway did little for most of them, however, and they went back to whatever they were doing. Leona, on the other hand, took notice. After all, Hautboy was her number one competition this weekend in Dramatic Interp. And she was his. They were both seniors, dancing around each other for the last three years, watching one another come up in the forensics world. And now here they were at the first event of their final season. The smart money was on one or the other of them winning everything in the region as the year played out. And perhaps one of them would win a national finals event at the end of the season.

Which meant that the other one would lose.

“Hautboy LeMonde,” Leona said, a little sexy, a lot softer than his booming greeting. She finished paying for her drink and walked past where the barrista was trying to make sense out of her order to the middle of the room, where Hautboy met her coming from the other direction. They double

air kissed, left and right, never touching any part of the other, not lip, not cheek, not arm, not elbow, not anything. Even Speecho-Americans who like each other never actually touch. And Speecho-Americans who see one another as the enemy? They touch even less.

“So what are you doing, darling?” Hautboy asked.

“Just coffee,” she replied.

“No, no. What are you doing as your piece?”

She looked over to the counter, where her drink had appeared. “I’ve got to get that,” she said.

“So we’re being secretive?” he asked her as she turned away.

She walked the few steps to the counter and back again. She took a sip from her plastic cup, then jiggled the ice cubes a few times. “What piece are you doing?” she asked him.

“Moi? I’m not quite sure yet,” Hautboy responded.

“So we’re being secretive?”

Hautboy laughed, and Leona joined him.

“Let me get a coffee. Can we talk?”

“Of course, dear boy.”

“One minute then.”

Hautboy walked off to the counter, and Leona claimed a couple of empty seats by the window. She had come up from Florida for the tournament, representing the forensics factory known as Kepler Star Academy. Her school had sent almost three dozen entries. At least half of them expected to break into elimination rounds. And at least half of those harbored reasonable hopes of winning their event. And at least one of them—Leona Keelhaul—was virtually a shoe-in, if it wasn’t for Hautboy LeMonde, who was the other shoe-in in DI. Leona liked Hautboy, of course, because they were cut from the same cloth. At the same time, that didn’t stop her from hating him, however.

“There,” he said, arriving with an iced drink of some sort and sitting down across from her. “All cozy.”

“So how are you doing, lover?”

“Darling, you can’t imagine.” He took a sip from his drink. “I’m lucky to be here today.”

She cocked an eyebrow. “Oh?”

“I got busted for porn surfing in the school computer lab.”

She frowned. “That doesn’t sound like you.”

“It doesn’t sound like anyone. Who the hell surfs porn in the school computer lab?”

“Exactly. That’s what the library is for!”

He laughed. "Needless to say, I was framed."

"So I would surmise. By whom?"

He leaned in closer. "My guess is one of my debaters."

"Really! I didn't know your school did policy."

"It's an LDer."

"Now that's hard to believe," Leona said. "I mean, I wouldn't put anything past a Polician, especially having to do with computer porn, but a nice little LDer? I wouldn't expect them to have the brain power."

"This nice little one does." He settled back again. "And I'd like to wring her nice little neck."

Leona nodded eagerly. "That sounds like a good idea. Then you'll get arrested and I'll have to compete in the final round without you to distract me."

"You'd like that."

"Like isn't the word. So what did you say your piece is?"

"I didn't say. But you'll find out in Finals."

"Not if you get arrested for murder."

"I can't kill her."

"I don't see why not."

"It's not our style. We've been nipping at each other for a while now. A gentle little competition of 'Get the Loser,' you might say."

"Avowed enemies, then?"

"Well, not like us, darling, but you seem to be getting the idea."

"We are not enemies, darling. We are lovers parading as enemies. There's a difference."

"More like enemies parading as lovers, Leona my dear."

"Whatever. So what happened with the computer porn?"

"The principal let me off. I think she was too embarrassed to pursue it."

"That must have been some porn."

He shook his head. "To tell you the truth, even I was embarrassed. And I don't give a crap about porn."

"I know. You're the world's worst adolescent, darling."

He shrugged. "Tell me about it."

"So what's your next move? I mean, seeing that you've got a one-upmanship thing going with this debater of yours. What's your next up?"

"I just don't know." He took another sip of his drink. "These things take time to figure out, and then they take time to put into effect."

"Well presumably you have all year. Is she a senior too?"

"Yep."

“It sounds like you and your little enemy have a lot to work out. Too bad you’re not friends with her. Like us.”

“Too bad,” Hautboy agreed.

And he thought about that for a moment. It *was* too bad that they were enemies. What if, in fact, he and Lily *were* friends? Then what?

Of maybe better, what if Lily just *thought* they were friends? That was even better when you got to the, Then what?

Then what?

He’d have to think about this. It did have possibilities. Evil possibilities.

And those were the best kind.

Kindred Spirits

It was one-thirty in the afternoon when Raga Dikeskroner roused himself from his bench on the Pup quadrangle. Since he had arrived, the stream of high school students had begun, growing exponentially, all heading toward the Chapel of the Holy Unwarranted Assumption.

It was time for Raga to move himself in that direction as well. If he could get past his intoxication.

He had been right. College students had warmed his blood. High school students had brought it to a boil.

He had recognized some of the people marching into the chapel. He had seen their pictures online, on Halefoil Cumcut’s

Victoria’sSecretBriefsQuotidian.org site. Thank God for people who randomly post photos of everyone they know, never thinking of the consequences. Of course, how many people knew that Raga Dikeskroner was one of the consequences? On the site there were photos of winners and almost-winners of various tournaments, there were coaches, there were instructors at summer debate camps. For Raga, seeing them in the flesh far outweighed seeing them online. And, of course, this was only the beginning.

At some point Raga would have to find Tarnish Jutmoll and introduce himself. He was, after all, claiming an interest in taking over Jutmoll’s coaching position when the old man retired. Raga could recall photos he had

seen of Jutmoll on Victoria'sSecretBriefsQuotidian.org. He really was old, and rather goatlike, and definitely in a position to start collecting Social Security. When Raga thought about how all this might play out, he wondered what would happen to Jutmoll. Would he retire? Would he abandon retirement for the sake of his students? Would he even live through it? Hard to tell. Very hard to tell.

Inside the chapel, it was relatively controlled chaos. There were tables all around, with coaches lined up at one or the other of them, while around the fringes of the room students were gabbing away, and Raga figured that they were mostly rubbing elbows with their fellow competitors from other schools. There was a tribal feel to this whole enterprise, of people gathering together from near and far for a shared ritual. The noise level was high but not overwhelming: the tall ceilings of the chapel dissipated the worst of it. No doubt this aspect of the acoustics made giving or listening to a sermon in this room difficult, but Raga wasn't one for either giving or listening to sermons, so he didn't dwell on the problem.

He went to the first table. "Judge sign in?" he asked someone wearing a yellow Pup shirt.

The Puppy pointed. "Over there."

"Thanks."

Raga followed in the direction indicated—and then he felt it. It was like he had stepped into an electrical field, a sensation both real and familiar.

He was not alone.

He stopped in his tracks and slowly scanned the room. Among what were easily a hundred and fifty or two hundred people registering for the tournament or running the registration or milling around in the corners, there was an Old One. It was, to Raga, like the smell of blood in the air. Literally.

And the other Old One obviously felt it too. Dealt it and smelled it.

Their eyes met across the room.

Raga Dikeskroner cocked an eyebrow. As did his counterpart.

Things were beginning to get even more interesting than Raga had expected. High school debate was absolutely not what he was expecting.

We went to the judges' table and signed in.

Definitely not what he was expecting.

Will Lily and Hautboy become the best of friends?

Will Leona Keelhaul keelhaul Hautboy LeMonde in the DI final round?

Will Raga and the other Old One join forces and burn all the copies of the Twilight series in the Pup bookstore?

Will Harry Potter Part Seven (Part One) be as dull as the first half of the book, meaning that instead of seeing the movie we can all go camping for a year or two and get the same experience?

Does it mean anything cosmic that Norton spelled backwards is No Tron?

You'll have to count the write-in votes in Alaska before discovering the lack of answers in our next episode: "Did Obama go to India to personally check out who was running the White House IT help desk, or, Thank God we don't have to worry about anything happening in Washington for the next two years."